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ABSTRACT

A pilot study on daily occurrences and events which cause worry, or pose a problem, difficulty, or bother to a sample of 18 adults diagnosed as mentally handicapped was carried out at the Vocational and Rehabilitation Research Institute, a demonstration and research facility for adults diagnosed as mentally handicapped. A questionnaire was designed and structured interviews were conducted. The frequency of reported worries was determined with respect to 36 previously identified stressful events or situations. The most frequently reported worries, difficulties, bothers, or problems occurred in areas dealing with "safety and personal well-being," "environmental stimuli," "job-related areas," and "personal, social and familial relationships." (Author/DB)

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What Worries Individuals with Mental Handicaps:

A Pilot Study

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Abstract

A pilot study on daily occurrences and events which cause worry, or pose a problem, difficulty or bother to a sample of 18 adults diagnosed as mentally handicapped was carried out at the Vocational and Rehabilitation Research Institute, a demonstration and research facility for adults diagnosed as mentally handicapped. A questionnaire was designed and structured interviews were conducted. The frequency of reported worries was determined with respect to 36 previously identified stressful events or situations. The most frequently reported worries, difficulties, bothers or problems occurred in areas dealing with 'safety and personal well-being', 'environmental stimuli', 'job-related areas' and 'personal, social and familial relationships'. Interpretations of the results, problems in questionnaire design and recommendations for future studies were also discussed.

It is well known that non-work related stress impairs job performance. Similarly, in rehabilitation programs for individuals diagnosed as mentally handicapped one would expect that non-program related stress undermines rehabilitation efforts. Literature indicates that relieving worry and potential stress in the mentally handicapped population may lead to higher performance levels in a variety of task areas (eg. Brown, Bayer, MacFarlane, Zwirner & Evans 1985; Levine & Langness, 1983; Cochran & Cleland, 1963).

A study by Weiner, Crawford and Snyder (1960) investigated the relationship between anxiety and scholastic achievement in individuals diagnosed as being mildly retarded. Achievement and anxiety levels were determined by the Wide Range Achievement arithmetic and reading subtests, the Bender-Gestalt Visual Motor Test and the childrens form of the test anxiety scale. Results indicated that high test anxiety resulted in poor achievement scores.

Levine and Langness (1983) documented the effects of anxiety on the performance of individuals diagnosed as retarded or non-retarded on a typical, everyday activity -- competitive basketball games. Participant observation, recording various aspects of athletic ability and self-report data on an anxiety inventory were used to assess anxiety and performance levels. The effects of anxiety on performance were found to be positively correlated for the non-retarded group and negatively correlated for the retarded group (i.e., performance increased for non-handicapped individuals and decreased for others).

Along a similar vein, various literature suggest that daily events and occurrences may be more worrisome or stressful to individuals diagnosed as mentally handicapped than their non-handicapped peers (Kanner, Coyne, Schaefer & Lazarus, 1981; Cochran & Cleland, 1963; Levine & Langness, 1983). Weinstock, Wulkan, Colon, Coleman & Goncalves (1979) suggested that a stressful event may have more drastic consequences for individuals who are in a dependent situation

and have available fewer social roles and differentiated behavior patterns to be used in coping.

Identifying events or situations which cause worry, anxiety and potential stress to individuals diagnosed as mentally handicapped is an obvious step in improving performance levels and expediating the rehabilitation process. This project attempts to outline daily events, situations and everyday occurrences which concern, worry, bother or pose a problem to individuals who have been diagnosed as mentally handicapped.

Method

Subjects

Subjects were selected from a list of all adults diagnosed as mentally handicapped and enrolled in day programs at the Vocational and Rehabilitation Research Institute, a large demonstration and rehabilitation research facility for adults diagnosed as mentally handicapped. A rehabilitation practitioner familiar with all clients of the Institute selected a pool of 50 subjects (25 men and 25 women) whose verbal and conceptual skills were felt to be adequate for the study. From this subject pool 10 men and 10 women were randomly selected to participate in the study. Client consent and parent/guardian consent was obtained for participation in the project. At the onset of the project, two subjects dropped out due to non-interest, leaving a sample of 18. Picture Peabody Vocabulary Test scores measuring verbal competency ranged from 90 to < 40, with an average score of 54.17.

Instrumentation

A questionnaire was designed to facilitate structured interviews. The interview consisted of 75 questions. The questions were obtained from two separate studies; the most frequently reported worries identified by members of the mentally handicapped population in 'Rehabilitation Programmes Study' (Brown

et al., 1985) and the most frequently reported daily hassles and chronic stressors in 'A Comparison of Two Modes of Stress Measurement: Daily Hassles and Uplifts Versus Major Life Events' (Kanner et al., 1981). Of the 75 item questionnaire, 36 items provided information on events or situations considered to be a bother, problem, difficulty or worry; these items were selected for the present study. For purposes of data summary a worries rating scale was constructed consisting of 4 values: (0) 'not reported' (1) 'worry a little' (2) 'worry some' and, (3) 'worry a lot'. Weighted measures were also calculated by multiplying frequencies by their respective rating.

Procedure

The interview was conducted in a familiar office area within the Institute by one rehabilitation practitioner and/or assistant and was administered once for each subject. Prior to commencement of the interview, the subjects were given a quick briefing about the questionnaire and were asked to answer the questions to the best of their ability.

Results

The top ten items reported most frequently to be a worry, bother, problem, or difficulty are presented in Table 1. As the table shows most items deal with the behavior or reaction of others. Items were grouped into seven categories and mean weighted measures were calculated. Table 2 presents the 36 items and associated ratings and weighted measures. The categories reported to be most bothersome or worrisome, in descending order were: safety and personal well-being, environmental stimuli, job-related areas, social relationships, world situations and miscellaneous.

Discussion

In this study we found that poor behavior of others received the highest

score, and Safety and Personal Well-being is the category with the highest mean score. These results suggest that subjects of this study mostly worry about events over which they have little or no control. Clearly programs to acquire appropriate coping strategies and those improving competence and thus reducing anxiety, stress (eg., Levine, 1985; Levine & Langness, 1983; Weinstock et al., 1979) poor daily functioning, depresson, withdrawal, anger, and fear (Weinstock et al., 1979) are in order. Events which non-handicapped individuals may take for granted may cause much frustration and distress for persons diagnosed as mntally handicapped (Cochran & Cleland, 1963).

In general, fundamental lifestyle differences between non-handicapped individuals and those diagnosed as mentally handicapped such as attendance in day training programs, congregated living conditions, on-going training, and pressure towards community integration may lead to worry and potential stress. Worry associated with these everyday situations may cause depreciated performance in other activities such as work production rates in vocational environments. Also, worry may lead to feelings of low self-esteem, and mal-adaptive social skills (Brown et al., 1985; Levine & Langness, 1983). Attention must be given to ensure that individuals diagnosed as mentally handicapped be given opportunity and guidance in acquiring appropriate coping strategies and raising feelings of competency for worrisome and anxiety producing situations.

This short study done to identify worrisome situations points into a direction for future investigations. Clearly, the questions presented in this study limited the possible responses. Although the questions were based on research of others, we have no reason to believe that they represented an exhaustive list of questions. In future research a framework for an exhaustive list of questions and procedures to assure reliability and validity must be

established. The practical implications of results of such studies are quite obvious; by identifying personal worries of individuals who are diagnosed as mentally handicapped and by overcoming these worries, an increase in feelings of competency and self-esteem are expected.

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Table 1

Top Ten Items Reported to be a Worry, Bother, Problem or Difficulty

Item	Intensity				Weighted
	0	1	2	3	Measure
Does it bother you when others behave badly?	2	2	2	12	42
Do you worry about your own safety?	3	3	4	8	36
Does it bother you to be in a place that is very hot?	4	4	3	7	31
Does crime bother you?	7	1	1	9	30
Do you ever worry that you might be late for work?	5	3	3	7	30
Does it bother you when you make silly mistakes?	3	6	3	6	30
Does it bother you that the prices of things are going up?	6	2	4	6	28
Does it bother you to be in a cold place?	8	1	1	8	27
Do you worry that you won't find a job?	7	1	3	7	27

Note 1: 0 = not reported, 1 = a little, 2 = some, 3 = a lot.

Table 2

Frequency and Weighted Measure of Items Reported to be a Problem, Difficulty, Bother or Worry

Item	Intensity				Weighted
	0	1	2	3	Measure
Safety and Personal Well-being					
70. Does crime bother you?	7	1	1	9	30
26. Do you worry about your own safety?	3	3	4	8	36
22. Do you worry about getting into trouble with staff, police, parents, etc.?	11	1	3	3	16
Mean Weighted Measure					27
Environmental Physical Stimuli					
12. Does it bother you to be in a cold place?	8	1	1	8	27
36. Does it bother you to be in a place that is very hot?	4	4	3	7	13
30. Does it bother you when you are in a noisy place?	6	3	4	5	26
69. Does bad weather bother you?	8	1	1	8	27
71. Does heavy traffic bother you?	9	1	1	7	24
75. Does waiting for a bus or in a line-up at a movie theatre bother you?	11	0	2	5	19
Mean Weighted Measure					22.7
Job Related					
32. Do you worry that you won't find a job?	7	1	3	7	27
40. Do you ever worry about how you are doing at work?	11	2	3	2	14
50. Do you ever worry about losing your job?	12	3	1	2	11
55. Do you ever worry that you might be late for work?	5	3	3	7	30
34. Do you worry about your conference?	11	2	0	5	17
Mean Weighted Measure					19.8

Table 2 Cont....

Freqeuncy of Items Reported to be a Bother, Worry, Problem or Difficulty

Item	Intensity				Weighted
	0	1	2	3	Measure
Personal Social and Familial Relationships					
41. Do you worry about how you should act around men/women?	8	3	2	5	22
35. Does it bother you when others behave badly?	2	2	2	12	42
8. Do you ever worry about your friends?	8	2	2	6	24
59. Does it bother you when you have problems with your neighbors?	14	4	0	0	4
63. Do you worry that people that you like won't like you?	8	3	1	6	23
64. Does it bother you that you don't get to see friends and relatives regularly?	16	1	1	0	3
21. Do you worry about the health of the people in your family?	10	2	1	5	19
Mean Weighted Measure					19.6
World Situations					
29. Do you worry about things that are going on in the world like politics, war, the middle east situation?	13	0	2	3	13
49. Does Alberta's economy worry you?	14	0	1	3	10
67. Does it bother you that the prices of things are going up?	6	2	4	6	28
Mean Weighted Measure					17

Table 2 Cont...

Frequency of Items Reported to be a Bother, Worry, Problem or Difficutly

Item	Intensity				Weighted
	0	1	2	3	Measure
Miscellaneous					
44. Do you ever have problems understanding what other people are saying?	7	4	1	6	24
47. Does it bother you that you need help getting dressed?	18	0	0	0	0
48. Do you ever have problems in your group home?	13	0	2	3	13
39. Do you ever worry about where to live in the future?	11	2	0	5	17
23. Do you worry about crossing the street?	16	0	0	2	6
3. Do you worry about getting on the wrong bus?	15	1	0	2	7
24. Is losing things a problem for you?	8	4	2	4	20
58. Do you ever worry about the future?	8	4	1	5	21
62. Does it bother you when you make silly mistakes?	3	6	3	6	30
68. Do you have difficulties seeing or hearing?	16	1	1	0	3
73. Do you have problems with reading, writing or spelling?	14	1	0	3	10
1. Do you ever have problems getting to sleep?	11	0	5	2	16
Mean Weighted Measure 13.92					

Note 1: 0 = not reported, 1 = a little, 2 = some, 3 = a lot.